



# Australian Bureau of Statistics

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### **ABS stands by Census homeless count**

It has been reported that the Census "appears to be grossly underestimating" Australia's homeless population.

This claim is based on a health service survey of the central business district of one city - Adelaide. This survey estimated that between 311 and 455 homeless people were living in the CBD. The study counted people over a 4 month period in June-September 2005. This type of study will include people moving in and out of homelessness, as well as homeless people who are moving in and out between the city and other places.

The results of this survey were compared to the Census count of 2001, four years earlier. This Census count dealt with one night only - August 7. The Census counts two groups of homeless - those who had no conventional roof over their heads on Census night and those who, on Census night, stayed at such places as refuges and hostels. While the 2001 Census figure for primary homeless was 104, the overall Census figure for homeless in the Adelaide CBD was 712.

Census night is a cold time of the year, when many people who may at other times be on the streets are staying in shelters, hostels or with friends/acquaintances in private dwellings, so would not be included in the "primary" homeless count, though could appear in the broader homeless count.

There are always difficulties in counting a population such as the homeless, but the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which conducts the Census, takes its responsibilities in this area very seriously.

The head of Census Paul Williams said, "The ABS is recognised internationally as having one of the best procedures for counting the homeless in a Census. The ABS has always endeavoured to count the homeless in the Census, but since 1996 the ABS has instituted a range of special procedures to count them. The ABS has continued to refine and improve those procedures.

"Contrary to claims, the ABS does not just leave forms in places where the homeless congregate for them to fill in. People who work with the homeless - and even homeless people themselves - are recruited and trained by the ABS to be interviewers. Interviewers use a shortened version of the Census form to record details from individuals. Homeless people unable to be interviewed are also counted.

"The Census will be held on 8 August this year and a range of organisations dealing with the homeless have been consulted about strategies, procedures and promotional activities to be used for counting the homeless in the Census. We will do our very best to get an accurate count of the homeless."

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